Fiṭrah and Its Bearing on the Principles of Psychology

Yasien Mohamed

There is not a newborn child who is not born in a state of fiṭrah. *His parents then make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, just as an animal is born intact. Do you observe any among them that are maimed (at birth)?*[1]

Though the discipline of psychology is a well-developed empirical science in the West today, few psychologists have dipped into the religious and philosophical literature of the East. It is our intent here to discuss the psychological discourse in classical Islamic literature, which offers insights into human nature and the psychology of human behavior that are relevant for contemporary psychotherapy. Such an undertaking will also reveal that the psychological facets of Islam are interwoven closely with its metaphysical, volitional, and ethical aspects. It would therefore be worthwhile to abstract psychological elements from the Islamic legacy, systematize them, and present the findings within an Islamic framework and in an idiom that would interest the modern psychologist.

According to Ismāʿīl al Fārūqī, the relevance of Islam to psychology or any other discipline can be determined by discovering what the legacy of Islam has to say on the discipline in question.[2] Although the discipline "Islamic psychology" does not exist within the Islamic legacy as we know it in the West, there is no reason why such a discipline cannot develop. Contemporary efforts to bring about an Islamic psychology are few and far between. We have yet to see an introduction to Islamic psychology similar to what we have seen in the cases of anthropology and sociology.[3] Our contribution, therefore, consists of developing an introduction to Islamic psychology with *fiṭrah* as our point of departure.

At a time when psychology is struggling to emerge as an autonomous discipline by shedding its old links with philosophy, any attempt to go in the opposite direction may seem retrogressive. However, today there is an

Yasien Mohamed is associated with the University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa.

equally significant move within the behavioral sciences to break through the parochial Eurocentric fences and seek a more comprehensive picture of humanity and human nature. Carl Rogers, for instance, emphasized the need for a methodology that would take into account the subjective experience of individuals. Philosophers have pointed to the need to integrate mental concepts and ethics, which would lead to the enrichment of both fields. In this article, we will contribute to this search for a comprehensive picture of human nature by introducing the reader to the Islamic concept of human nature (*fiṭrah*). Furthermore, we will show the relevance of this concept to developing the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, psychological, and legal principles of Islamic psychology.

The opening quotation, which is the central hadith on *fiṭrah*, is our starting point for an understanding of human nature in Islam. There are at least three interpretations of *fiṭrah*, but we have found that the positive view remains the ideal theoretical model for the prognosis of its implications.[4] *Fiṭrah* relates to the individual's innate reality and also has a bearing on one's beliefs, values and attitudes to life, worldview, and interaction with the surrounding environment. As such, *fiṭrah* cannot be viewed in isolation from one's mind, conduct, and institutions in the phenomenal world.

Fiṭrah may be described as a God-given innate state or inclination to believe in God and to worship Him. It can also be translated as "original purity" or "primordial faith"—an ontological state that disposes the individual to the good and the lawful. The *Lisān al 'Arab* defines it as the

> natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother's womb in a state of happiness or misery; but it could also mean the truth of the shahadah which expresses *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God and the messengership of Muhammad. Thus, *fiṭrah* also expresses the truth about religion.[5]

According to the hadith, one is born in a state of *fiṭrah*, of primordial faith—and hence as a Muslim—and is then made to adhere to another religion by his/her parents through the process of socialization. Therefore, any individual who dies before reaching the age of discretion enters paradise. We shall elaborate on the implications of *fiṭrah* and their bearing on the principles of Islamic psychology. These principles make up the basic features of Islamic psychology and provide a framework from which to assess western psychology critically and to integrate useful western therapeutic techniques in order to enrich the discipline of Islamic psychology.

The Metaphysical Principle

The ideal point of departure for an understanding of the implications of *fiṭrah* is the metaphysical principle that underlies the notion of the concept. By means of this principle, we come to understand the place of the human individual in the universe, as well as his/her essential spiritual nature and ultimate destiny. Moreover, it is this principle that provides the foundation

for the Islamic creed and from which all other true belief and value systems are derived. Accordingly, all other implications of *fiṭrah* are rooted in this metaphysical principle.

Implicit in the idea of *fiṭrah* is the view that each human being is born with the innate predisposition to believe in and to worship the One God. In other words, *tawḥīd* (the unity of God) is integral to one's innate nature. The mission of all prophets from Adam to Muhammad was, in essence, to convey the message of *tawḥīd*: the belief in and submission to the One God. It is a monotheistic message intended for humanity to actualize its *fiṭrah* and to manifest its primordial faith. This constitutes the affirmation of the *shahādah*, which makes a person a Muslim and reconciles one to his/her original faith in God (*tawḥīd*). Since *tawḥīd* is integral to *fiṭrah*, it is the principle that governs the metaphysical principle of Islamic psychology.

Each individual is a "central being" in the world, for all of humanity has been honored with the status of vicegerent of God on earth (*khalīfat Allāh*). Humanity was taught the "names" of all things and, as such, was given power and dominion over all things. The centrality of an individual's being and existence is an empirical given, an immutable reality that humanity must necessarily accept. However, the right of humanity to dominate the earth as vicegerent is justified only on condition that it remain an obedient servant (*'abd*) functioning in perfect submission to God, the absolute Master of nature.

At the core of the individual's being is his/her primordial nature, which he/she possessed before the "fall" on earth and which he/she still carries deep within himself/herself. In this original state of *fiṭrah*, the individual is potentially the perfect vicegerent but, due to forgetfulness, is prone to exploit the power and privilege afforded humanity for his/her own selfish ends. The power of intellect and will, which was given to humanity on account of its status as vicegerent, has been employed for evil and destructive purposes precisely because its role as a servant of God has been neglected. Only through submission, as a servant of God, will humanity be able to use its power and privilege over nature in a positive and spiritually progressive way. As such, humanity is always in need of divine revelation and grace from God. Although one may ignore the divine revelation, whch seeks to remind the individual of his/her primordial nature, and although one may deviate from the dictates of his/her theomorphic nature, one cannot escape fully from what he/she essentially is. Therefore, the individual's essential nature must manifest itself on the periphery.[6]

Humanity, above all creation, accepted the burden of trust (*amānah*):

> Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and earth and the mountains and they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it and man assumed it. (Qur'an 33:72)

This acceptance is precisely the acceptance of the burden of serving as God's vicegerent on earth, the acceptance of freedom and accountability to God and His creation. In terms of the metaphysical principle of *tawḥīd*

referred to above, humanity's return to its original state of *fiṭrah* can be effected by accepting the shahādah: *lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, which, translated literally, states that there is none worthy of worship except God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God).[7] One's acceptance of this represents a conscious acknowledgment of Muhammad as the ideal exemplar, the spiritual prototype who is to be emulated in the journey to the origin: the Absolute. The "universal man," therefore, represents the sum of all degrees of existence, a "total mirror before the Divine presence and at the same time the supreme archetype of creation."[8] This human prototype—the "universal man's" ontological reality—can be realized through one's sense of trust and faith, and it would give him/her the happiness and peace that is sought in this world and in the hereafter.[9]

The Islamic understanding of the way human beings are placed in creation is understood through the metaphysical implication of *fiṭrah*. Hence, the metaphysical principle of Islamic psychology provides the philosophical background for understanding the dynamics of the psyche, the self, or the *nafs*. Western psychology ignores the metaphysical principle, because it recognizes only the biological and psychical dimensions of the individual. In Islamic psychology, the spiritual dimension (*rūḥ*), with which every individual has been endowed by God, is integral to human nature and is distinct from one's biological and psychical aspects (*nafs*). The self (*nafs*) is the dynamic and negative tendency found in each individual that makes rebellion against God possible. According to Islam, it should be trained to take on the pure qualities of the *rūḥ*, which is from the divine source and is therefore intrinsic to human nature:

> And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit (*min rūḥī*) then fall down before him prostrate. (Qur'an 15:29)

The realization of *fiṭrah* would, therefore, mean the rejoining of the self (*nafs*) to the human soul (*rūḥ*), for in this realization lies the knowledge of God, as suggested by the saying: "He who knows himself, knows his Lord." This represents the highest level of spiritual development, the stage of the "contented self" (*al nafs al mutma'innah*), when the individual is in harmony with his/her *fiṭrah* and is pleased with God. At this stage, God is pleased with the individual. The metaphysical principle of Islamic psychology, then, provides the foundation upon which all other principles of Islamic psychology are based and defines the essential origin and direction of humanity and its relationship to God and the universe.

The Epistemological Principle

The guidance for humanity's submission to God can be found in the Qur'anic revelation. Apart from revelation as an objective source of knowledge and guidance, human beings have been endowed with the organs of cognition: the heart (*qalb*) and the intellect (*'aql*).[10] These organs enable the individual to comprehend the highest source of knowledge (divine revela-

tion) and to perceive at the highest level in the hierarchy of human perception. The three levels of human perception are illustrated below:

Table 1: The Three Levels of Human Perception

Level of Perception	Perceputal Process	Faculty
Sensory	Sight, hearing, smell, etc.	Eyes, ears, etc.
Intellectual	Cognition, reasoning, insight, etc.	*'aql,* mind
Spiritual	Intuition, intellection inspiration	*'aql, qalb*

As can be noted from the table, the epistemological principle of Islamic psychology recognizes all levels of human perception. By contrast, western psychology recognizes only sensory and intellectual perception.[11] All of these levels of knowledge are "true" and "real." Therefore, truth–falsehood is a scale on which all perceptions of our faculties may find a place. The epistemological principle of Islamic psychology recognizes all of these levels of perception and realities as constituting legitimate knowledge and, further, recognizes a hierarchy of knowledge, the lowest level being that of sensory perception and the highest level being that of spiritual perception.[12] Thus the epistemological principle of Islamic psychology recognizes revelation as a source of knowledge and guidance and, at the same time, recognizes the individual's capacity and need for all levels of perception: sensory, intellectual, and spiritual. Sensory observation and discursive reason are important, but they are not the only methods of arriving at knowledge.

The Ethical Principle

The nature of one's *fiṭrah* is such that he/she is innately predisposed to recognize the Creator, to worship Him, and to conform to divinely ordained ethical injunctions. Righteous deeds are natural and are harmonious with one's *fiṭrah,* for God has implanted in man the love of the good and the love of the values that are the constituents of divine will.[13]

The individual's worship of the Creator, therefore, is, not confined to belief and formal prayer to God, but includes ethical conduct as well. God prohibits and instructs in matters relating to food and drink, marital relationships, social justice, and many other areas of one's life. Since the individual's true nature is one of intrinsic goodness, one is expected to conform to the divine laws that will guide him/her to good conduct. The ethical principle of Islamic psychology aims at making the values of

truth, honesty, brotherly/sisterly feelings, and so forth, dear to one's heart, and the vices of dishonesty, hypocrisy, and so forth, abhorrent to the individual. The Qur'an addresses the Companions of the Prophet:

> God has endeared to you belief, and made it graceful to your hearts; and He has made detestable to you unbelief, ungodliness and disobedience. (49:7-8)

The believers have developed and sensitized their *fiṭrah* to such an extent that they find belief and virtue endearing and disbelief and vice abhorrent. Moral virtue is therefore a characteristic of human nature. We are able to recognize easily, through our *fiṭrah*, a morally virtuous person and seek to emulate him/her or to attain a high moral standard ourselves. Virtue or knowledge of the good, therefore, may be considered both innate and acquired. It is not innate in the sense that it is the conscious possession of the child at birth, but as an inborn quality of the soul, its conscious realization depending on environmental circumstances. Yet the virtue that results is not the creation of the moral instruction and the right environment

> any more than the blossom on the plant in the conservatory is the creation of the conservatory. The blossom springs from the seed (fiṭrah) which was there in the first place; the conservatory provides the environment in which alone the seed can blossom.[14]

The ethical principle of Islamic psychology will encourage the cultivation of virtue and will create an environment conducive to the development of virtues. For example, a Muslim psychologist would make prayer facilities available to patients or clients, for Islamic psychology encourages prayer as a means for inculcating noble qualities:

> Verily, prayer protects against indecency (*faḥshah*) and dishonor (*munkar*) and it makes one mindful of God which is more important. (29:45)

Therefore, the prescribed forms of worship, if performed properly and sincerely, will prevent an individual from indulging in vices and inculcate the discipline for proper ethical conduct. Since an individual is innately predisposed to virtue, a healthy social environment is required in order to awaken this inherent virtue. The expression of virtue in a social context may be referred to as morality, and thus the ethical dimension of this morality is derived from human nature itself. However, it is also the consequence of social moral prescriptions.

Al-Hashimi states:

> Psychological studies will never be complete unless they enter the sphere of values and morals, provided that these values are

> God-inspired and in accordance with man's innate nature or *fiṭrah*.[15]

Thus the innate goodness of the human *fiṭrah* introduces us to the ethical principle of Islamic psychology.

The Psychological Principle

Although one is born in a state of *fiṭrah*, he/she also has the potential for evil as represented by the self (*nafs*).

To actualize his/her *fiṭrah*, an individual must discipline the self. Each person has been endowed with *fiṭrah*, intellect, and free will to choose good from evil. Human affective and biological impulses are not inherently evil. However, they are readily susceptible to evil stimuli and need to be controlled and directed in accordance with divinely prescribed laws so that the self can attain the highest level of spiritual achievement (*al nafs al mutma'innah*). The individual who has attained a higher spiritual consciousness has passed through at least three distinct phases of psychospiritual growth.[16] As "carnal principle," the self obtains a negative character in the Qur'an through the attribution of *al nafs al ammārah bi su'*[17] (commanding self), whereas the soul (*rūḥ*) tends to be viewed as the divine spirit breathed into each human being. This aspect of the self is referred to as the "lower self," which Tustārī grouped under four main groups.[18]

In its role of *al nafs al lawwāmah* (Qur'an 75:2), the soul does not submit totally to the carnal self. The motive force of *al nafs al lawwāmah* is fulfilled when it reaches the final stage of psychospiritual growth: *al nafs al mutma'innah* (the contented self). At this latter stage, the individual is totally liberated from the carnal self and attains the highest level of spiritual equilibrium. The self now adopts the characteristics of the soul, with which it is integrated in a state of complete psychospiritual harmony. Hence, the psychological or psychical implications of *fiṭrah* are associated with the self and the emotions and desires that are integral to it.

Positive or negative tendencies can arise from the self depending on whether or not it is guided. For emotions to be directed to higher spiritual ends, the self must be disciplined. According to al-Hashimi, drives and emotions should be directed to win Gods's favor, a goal that does not conflict with piety provided it does not transgress the ways allowed in Islam.[19] Two primary attributes of the self are passion and anger, which serve as the sources of all other negative drives and are manifested as a consequence of their influence. Passion instinctively tends to weigh the individual down with an inertia of complacency and indulgence while, at the same time, it is expressive and pulsates with its own energy, dispersing waves of its activity beyond itself. Anger is an emotion bent on glorification, arrogance, and domination, while its energy serves to stifle its own dynamic and confines free emotional expression to forceful self-justification. These attributes suggest an ambivalence in human emotional

states because of their positive and negative tendencies, but they are, nonetheless, integral to the soul. Passion may yet appeal to the individual's sense of charisma, provide him/her with a pleasant disposition and produce a sense of serenity, while anger may serve the function of self-preservation, resisting falsehood, and establishing harmony where there is discord.

However, equilibrium in the degree to which these drives influence an individual's thought and behavior must be maintained, for a lack of such drives may prove harmful to the soul and body while an excess may affect adversely one's intellect and faith. Indeed, the refinement and discipline of the self involves restoring the attributes of anger and passion to a state of equilibrium with the goal of avoiding descent to the animal and bestial state and preventing the emergence of other reprehensible attributes. As to how this state of equilibrium is to be maintained, Najm al Dīn al Rāzī (654 A.H. / 1256 C.E.) states:

> In obedience to the law (Shari'ah), man should earnestly fear God, and not strive to seek dispensation, for the Law and the fear of God are a balance which maintain the attributes in a state of equilibrium, preventing some from prevailing over others. Disequilibrium would be in a state of animals and beasts of prey, for in animals the attribute of passion prevails over that of anger and in beasts of prey the attribute of anger prevails over that of passion. Of necessity animals are therefore given to greed and lust, and beasts of prey to conquest, wrath, and dominance, to killing and hunting.[20]

According to al Rāzī, the "alchemy of the Law" is not intended to efface reprehensible attributes, for that would result in a deficient spiritual and physical well-being. Herein lies the folly of those philosophers who sought the complete elimination of such attributes as anger, passion, and lust. Instead, the property of the Shari'ah and the alchemy of religion is to restore each attribute to a state of equilibrium in the soul so that they may be exercised in accordance with the Shari'ah and cause thereby praiseworthy attributes to emerge from within the self.

The somewhat paradoxical nature of these drives is revealed when their energy, after being transmuted in order to manifest its potential for good, elevates the individual to the highest level of psychospiritual development (*al nafs al mutma'innah*). Socially, anger plays a vital role in manifesting the believer's spiritual consciousness, as seen in the hadith:

> Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot,then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith.[21]

This hadith refers to the conduct of the believer who experiences holy anger with respect to social conditions. Holy passion, like holy anger, is sanctified by one's *fiṭrah*. The natural energy of passion, under the guidance

of *fiṭrah*, teaches the pious believer the difference between attachment to the absolute Creator and His divine guidance and attachment to all relative phenomena.

Imam al Ghazāli's theory of dynamic interaction throws light on how the elements of anger and appetite (passion), when controlled and transmuted with the help of the intellect (*'aql*), are able to transform the self (lower *nafs*) into the higher levels of psychospiritual development and, in so doing, actualize the state of *fiṭrah*.[22]

From the aforementioned discussion, we can deduce the psychological implications of *fiṭrah* and its bearing on the psychological principle of Islamic psychology. This principle recognizes three dimensions: biological, psychological, and spiritual. Whereas the monastic orientated religions tend to recognize the spiritual dimension at the expense of one's biological and psychological urges, western psychology tends to focus on the biological and the psychological dimensions while ignoring one's spiritual urges. Islamic psychology, however, recognizes the individual's totality, including his/her biological and psychological needs that are to be transformed to higher spiritual ends. The psychological principle of Islamic psychology is therefore holistic and dynamic and also prepares the ground for developmental psychology, which takes into account the different phases of psychospiritual development.

The Volitional Principle

Implicit in the opening hadith is the notion of deviation from Islam, and hence from *fiṭrah,* because of environmental influences. This implies that one is free to actualize or deviate from his/her *fiṭrah*. The volitional principle of Islamic psychology, then, is derived from this capacity of free will. There is abundant evidence in the Qur'an to suggest that each human being has been granted the freedom to choose between good and evil. The following verses bear ample testimony to this:

> We have truly shown the way; he may be thankful or unthankful. (76:3)

> The truth is from your Lord, so let him who will believe and let him who will disbelieve. (18:29)

> But truly He is forgiving to whoever repents and believes and acts uprightly, and lets himself be guided. (20:82)

Although good and evil are predetermined tendencies in the scheme of creation, each individual is nevertheless compelled to make a choice by virtue of his/her God-given freedom. It is this capacity for choice and initiative that enables one to bring about changes, for better or worse, in his/her self or environment, depending on whether or not the revelation is being followed:

> Man shall get nothing but what he strives for. (39:53)
>
> Verily, Allah does not change that which people are (their condition) until they change that which is in themselves. (13:11)

Thus, the onus is on the individual to take the initiative to change himself/herself. God will change the condition of a people only if they exercise a conscious choice and initiative to change themselves. Free will implies responsibility, and humanity is responsible to its Creator:

> Verily, We proposed to the Heavens and the Earth, and to the mountains to receive the responsibility (*amānah*), they refused the burden, and they feared to receive it. Man undertook to bear it. Verily, he was unjust, senseless. (33:72)

According to Ibn ʻAbbās, an early classical commentator, *amānah* means obedience (*ṭāʻah*) and implies the offer of freedom and responsibility that the heavens and earth refuse to accept but was accepted by Adam. God told Adam: "If you do good you will be rewarded, and if you do evil you will be punished." This is why God uses the words unjust (*ẓulumān*) and senseless (*jahūlah*). Mujāḥid, Daḥḥāk and Ḥasan al Baṣrī agree that *amānah* involves the compulsory duties (*al farāʼid*) and the implication of punishment and reward.[23] In short, it means responsibility for obedience to God. This responsibility is on account of intellect (*ʻaql*) and will (*irādah*):

> If you did well, you did well for yourselves; if you did evil (you did it) against yourselves. (17:17)
>
> Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good see it, and anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it. (99:7-8)

Due to its possession of freedom and responsibility, humanity was distinguished from all of creation by virtue of its power and was therefore made vicegerent of God. However, humanity is also weak and thus dependent on God's guidance, which is accessible through the individual's inherent capacity to distinguish right from wrong (*fiṭrah*) and through divine revelation and prophets. In sum, the individual's freedom is a true freedom and he/she alone is accountable to God for his/her actions. Absolute freedom is the prerogative of God, and therefore the gift of free will should not make one arrogant. The individual can be saved from the illusion of his/her self-sufficiency by submitting his/her will to the Will of God.

The individual's freedom is curbed by the psychological limitations of his/her lower self and the influence of Satan. But one's self can be liberated from the negative effects of the self and of Satan by attaining harmony with his/her *fiṭrah* and with the divine will. In other words, the will (with the help of intellect and revelation) is capable of transforming the physical,

emotional, and psychological dimensions in order to achieve spiritual ends. Imām al Ghazālī's dynamic interaction theory illustrates the role of the intellect (*'aql*) in subduing the animal forces of anger and appetite, which, through the instigation of the Satanic element, seek to dominate the will.[24]

Fiṭrah implies, therefore, the individual's capacity to realize his/her ontological *fiṭrah* and to attain inner peace and happiness. By extension, the volitional implication of *fiṭrah* implies that a society made up of free individuals will strive to create a sociopolitical system based on the Shari'ah and to facilitate the actualization of *fiṭrah* of its citizens. In terms of this interpretation of *fiṭrah,* the individual and the collectivity must resist all forces, agencies, and systems that impede the striving toward the actualization of one's full spiritual, moral, and intellectual potential.

Since *fiṭrah* implies free will, we can derive from this notion the volitional principle of Islamic psychology. The patient (provided he/she is not psychotic) is treated as a responsible being who is capable of changing for the better. By contrast, western psychology tends to have a deterministic outlook and generally ignores the notion of responsibility, especially in the cases of behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis. The humanistic and existentialistic schools of psychology, however, recognize the notion of human responsibility, but claim that it applies only for and to oneself. The volitional principle of Islamic psychology, therefore, expects the individual to be accountable to God. Such a spiritually dynamic principle exercises a profound influence on one's attitudes and behavior.

The Legal Principle

As a free being, each individual is expected to conform to the will of God as enshrined in the Shari'ah. Imām al Nawawī defines *fiṭrah* as the unconfirmed state of *īmān* (faith) until belief is acknowledged consciously. Hence, if a child were to die before the age of discretion, he/she will be one of the inmates of paradise. This view applies to children of polytheistic parents as well and is supported by the following hadith:

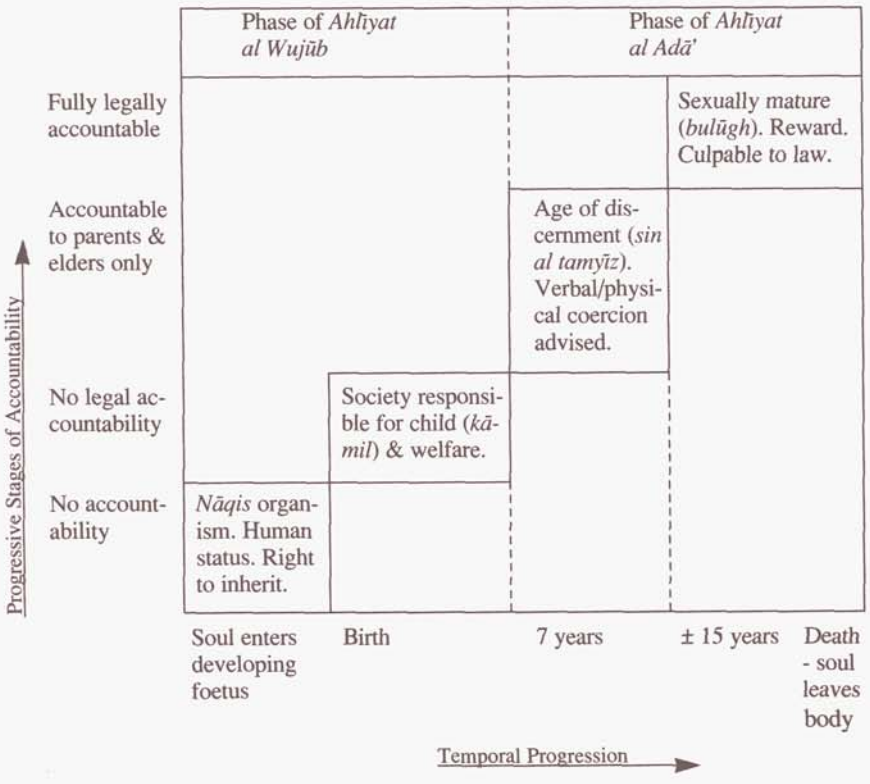
> It is related that the Prophet said that he saw in a vision an old man at the foot of a large tree. Around him were children. In the vision, he was told that the old man was Abraham, and that the children around him were children who had died before attaining the age of discretion. Some of the Muslims asked him: "And the children of the polytheists too, O Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet replied: "The children of the polytheists as well."[25]

This interpretation has legal implications, namely, that a child is born as a Muslim and is pure, without sin, and predisposed to the belief and worship of the Creator. Some scholars, such as al Qāḍī Abī Ya'lī, argue that if *fiṭrah* means Islam, a child of polytheistic parents cannot inherit from them in terms of Islamic law. However, al Nawawī argues that although the child is born into a non-Muslim family, he/she will enter paradise in the case of

his/her death. Ibn Taymīyah defends this view[26] and opines that if either the father or the mother is a Muslim, the child is considered a Muslim and subject to Islamic law. However, if the child is born to non-Muslim parents, he/she will be subject to their law, despite his/her inherent state of *fiṭrah*. Islamic law, therefore, does not apply to them. The hadith that every child is born a Muslim has greater narrative than statutory value, and this explains the apparent inconsistency in the actual legal status of such a child. Another explanation is that being turned into a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian is to be understood figuratively: change takes place in the child from birth. The child's legal religion is therefore that of its parents, although he/she adopts that religion only when mentally mature.[27]

Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al fiqh*) recognizes four stages or phases in one's life, each of which espouses a degree of responsibility governed by Islamic jurisprudence. We will discuss the legal parameters of human responsibility or the legal implications of the volitional principle of Islamic psychology. The diagram below shows that the degree of responsibility is proportional to the degree of competence. Islamic law and the degree of responsibility necessary for one's adherence to the law are linked directly to one's particular stage. Human behavior and accountability for personal behavior are governed by these phases:

Diagram 1: The Cumulative Development of the Degree of Legal Responsibility over Time


Phase of Ahlīyat al Wujūb
Phase of Ahlīyat al Adā'
Fully legally accountable
Accountable to parents & elders only
No legal accountability
No accountability
Sexually mature (bulūgh). Reward. Culpable to law.
Age of discernment (sin al tamyīz). Verbal/physical coercion advised.
Society responsible for child (kāmil) & welfare.
Nāqis organism. Human status. Right to inherit.
Progressive Stages of Accountability
Soul enters developing foetus
Birth
7 years
± 15 years
Death - soul leaves body
Temporal Progression

The diagram indicates that human life is divided into two broad phases. The first phase is referred to, in Islamic legal terminology, as *ahlīyat al wujūb,* and the second phase is referred to as *ahlīyat al adā'*. Each phase is divided further into two substages. Islamic law governs these four stages by a very meticulously defined set of laws.[28]

The first stage begins when the soul enters the developing foetus and ends at childbirth. At this pre-childbirth stage, the organism is accorded human status and is referred to as *nāqis* (incomplete). After birth, it is referred to as *kāmil* (complete). Immediately after childbirth, the human being is not held responsible for anything. However, society is held responsible for the newborn's welfare. For example, the prenatal organism is legally entitled to inherit, but this right is not applicable when the child dies, at which time the parents or wards are held responsible for apportioning to the unborn child his/her rightful share of inheritance. Also, the mother has a major responsibility toward the child in that she is not permitted to consume any item, such as drugs, that would harm the foetus.

The second stage begins at birth and ends, approximately, when the child has reached the age of seven, which is regarded by most jurists as the age of discernment (*sin al tamyīz*). From the beginning of the first stage until the end of the second, the child is not considered legally accountable to anyone, although he/she is subject to parental guidance and is accountable to them as parents. The end of the second stage—reaching the age of seven—also marks the end of the first, for after age seven, he/she is categorized as *kāmil*, which means that he/she is neither responsible for his/her actions nor expected to conform to the Shari'ah.[29]

The individual's formal adherence to the Shari'ah begins when one has reached the age of discernment. The third stage (7–15 years) begins when the individual has reached the status of "complete" (*kāmil*). From the ages of 7 to 10, parents are encouraged to use verbal coercion (persuasion), but from the ages of 10 to 15, physical coercion is recommended. Parents are expected to urge their children to perform the prayer after they have reached the age of 7, a practice that is based upon a prophetic tradition (*murū awlādikum bi sab'ah sinīn*). Beginning with this stage and continuing until the child reaches the age of sexual maturity, he/she is expected to pray and will be rewarded for any good deeds. However, he/she is only partially responsible (*qāsirah*): he/she is responsible for obeying his/her parents, but not for abiding by the regulations of the Shari'ah. It is the parents' responsibility to encourage the child to pray, but he/she is not accountable to God for ignoring this duty.[30]

The individual becomes fully responsible for observing the Shari'ah in its totality during the fourth stage, which begins with the onset of sexual maturity (*bulūgh*) and lasts until death. Sexual maturity is determined by physical signs of a boy's ejaculation of semen and of a woman's menstruation. If no physical signs of sexual maturity are observed, one is considered to be sexually mature after reaching the age of fifteen lunar years. After this point, it becomes the parents' responsibility to apply coercive

strategies to make the child observe the Shari'ah. From the age of 10, parents are expected to use physical coercion, but from the age of 15 the child falls under the jurisdiction of the Shari'ah. From the age of discretion until the age of sexual maturity, the child is encouraged—but not compelled—to abide by the divine law. Upon reaching sexual maturity, the child becomes completely responsible for obeying divine injunctions (for which he/she will be rewarded) and for transgressing such injunctions (for which he/she is now liable to be punished).[31]

The normal set of laws will apply to a person who has attained sexual maturity (bāligh), but not, however, to a person who, through no fault of his/her own, suffers from an affliction that induces diminished responsibility. The Shari'ah lists six natural impediments, all of which are beyond one's control, that exempt an individual from complete responsibility: insanity, mental retardation, unconsciousness, sickness, death, and old age. If a person is afflicted by impediments that are self-inflicted and that cause him/her to violate the Shari'ah, such as missing the prayers due to intoxication, he/she is considered guilty of wilful transgression, for which there is no exemption. The Shari'ah applies to the drunk person because he/she falls in the category of *ahlīyat al adā'*. Any excuse, therefore, is untenable. An insane person, on the other hand, is legally exempt from the Shari'ah's dictates, because he/she is no longer regarded as being in the category of *ahlīyat al adā'*.[32]

Apart from drunkenness and negligence, indifference and a lack of common sense are considered unnatural impediments. It is not necessary to provide details of all these impediments and stages or the various opinions of the legal schools; suffice it to say that a given set of laws describes an individual's legal status, whether his/her conduct is influenced by physiological and psychological developmental factors or by the impediments referred to above. An outline of these phases, therefore, has practical implications for determining the extent of the individual's responsibility in Islamic psychology, which works within the framework of the Shari'ah.

In Muslim personal law, for example, marriage helps to regulate the lower self and, therefore, sexual passion. In formal worship (*'ibādāt*), the institutions of prayer (*ṣalāh*) and fasting (*sawm*) enable the believer to turn away from evil (*munkar*) and to enhance his/her consciousness of God—an essential process in the actualization of *fiṭrah*. Similarly, all other branches of the Shari'ah help to direct one's intellect and will to the actualization of his/her *fiṭrah*.

Thus from the legal implication of *fiṭrah* we can formulate the legal principle of Islamic psychology. Through this principle, the Muslim psychologist must consider the mature Muslim patient as responsible for his/her actions within the framework of the Shari'ah. The patient should conform to what is lawful (*ḥalāl*) and avoid what is unlawful (*ḥarām*). The legal implication also embraces the ethical dimension. Islamic psychology recognizes the four phases of human life that form the basis of child developmental psychology in Islam. The psychologist will have to

bear in mind the stage of the patient to know what is expected of him/her in terms of Islamic legal responsibility. Thus the legal principle of Islamic psychology will help the practitioner to distinguish the sane from the insane and the sexually mature from sexually immature, and will make it possible for them to be treated accordingly.

The Therapeutic Principle

As the religion of human nature (*dīn al fiṭrah*), Islam is designed to fulfil the needs of the individual's *fiṭrah*. Thus the Islamic way of life enhances one's spiritual inclination without neglecting the material and psychological aspects of his/her nature, which are, in any case, channeled to serve spiritual and ethical ends. If Islam is suited to human nature, then it must be the basis for a healthy and fulfilling life in all dimensions and, further, a preventer of mental illness. In addition, deviation from Islam implies deviation from *fiṭrah*, which results in the individual becoming prone to mental and spiritual sicknesses.

Many Muslims are suffering from psychological problems precisely because they have succumbed to foreign influences and its related spiritual, moral, psychological, and social problems. The problem is more critical with Muslim minorities who are in direct confrontation with a western dominated environment, as in South Africa or the United States. Potential problems arising out of the tension between Islamic and western cultural norms are depression, delinquency, drug addiction, neurosis, and alienation. Psychiatrists and psychologists should be aware of this problem if they wish to help their patients. Training in the West provides the practitioner with a Eurocentric bias, which does not always help in handling problems related to religions and cultures of the East. Malik Badri laments that many Muslim psychologists blindly imitate western psychotherapeutic approaches. He points out in his popular book, *The Dilemma of the Muslim Psychologist*, that although western trained psychologists are aware of the role of cultures in shaping behavior, they perceive the patient from their cultural bias.

The therapeutic principle of Islamic psychology is fully cognizant of these difficulties. Furthermore, because of the volitional and legal principle, it expects a certain degree of responsibility from the patient. Islamic psychology is also expected to deal with the mental illnesses that arise out of the tension of conflicting cultures. This is not limited to dealing with "mad" or psychotic individuals, but with psychologically normal people who need help because of their deviation from their *fiṭrah* or the Islamic pattern of life. Thus the therapeutic principle of Islamic psychology has its own concept of normality, as it is also concerned with the spiritual problems of the individual.

Islamic psychology draws upon Islamic therapeutic tools to treat Muslim patients, who are expected to be more receptive to Islamic prescriptions because of their faith. The psychologist cannot expect an unbeliever to pray, fast, ask for God's forgiveness, put his/her trust in God or

to engage in the Catholic ritual of confession for the purpose of healing. When Carl Jung demonstrated the curative value of religion, he must have assumed that the patients were Christians. However, whereas Jung views religion as a means to mental healing, the Islamic psychologist would not view it as only healing the mind but also the soul.

Western therapy, especially Freudian psychoanalysis, is descriptive and past-oriented, whereas Islamic therapy is prescriptive and future orientated: The therapeutic principle of Islamic psychology seeks to change the patient's future behavior by sensitizing his/her conscience and making him/her responsible to God. Western therapy, on the other hand, desensitizes the human conscience, because it is devoid of ethics based on religion. It is therefore not surprising that it treats the psychological symptoms of spiritual diseases through medication and, at the same time, fails to treat the causes of those diseases.

To conclude, we have presented an Islamic conception of human nature within the context of its relevance for the principles of Islamic psychology. We have contributed to that foundation upon which the structure of Islamic psychology can rest. What remains to be done is to uncover the rich contents of Islamic psychology that are embedded in the Islamic legacy and to develop the basis of Islamic psychotherapy. Once this is achieved, there is no reason why western psychological findings and therapeutic techniques cannot play a role in enriching Islamic psychology and bringing it up-to-date with contemporary reality. Such a synthesis would bridge the gap between Islamic and western psychology and would constitute a genuine Islamization of psychology.

Endnotes

1. Ḥanīf, "Book of Qaḍr," *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al Nawawī,* vol. 16 (al Maṭba'ah al Miṣrīyah bi al Azharī, 1930), 207. This hadith was narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah by Muslim (d. 206 A.H. / 821 C.E.).

2. I. R. al Fārūqī, *Islamization of Knowledge* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982), 39.

3. Y. Mohamed, "The Islamic Conception of Human Nature with Reference to the Develoment of an Islamic Psychology" (MA diss., University of Cape Town, 1986). On sociology and anthropology, see A. S. Ahmed, *Toward Islamic Anthropology* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986) and Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979). There is a paucity of literature even in these fields of Islamic sociology and anthropology.

4. Cf. Mohamed, *Islamic Conception,* chapter 6, for a lengthy exposition of the bearing of *fiṭrah* on the dimensions of an Islamic psychology. Cf. also chapter 1 for the three interpretations of fiṭrah: the dual (Quṭb), neutral (Ibn 'Abd al Barr), and the positive (Ibn Taymīyah) views.

5. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al 'Arab,* vol. 6 (Dār al Miṣrīyah, n.d.), 316; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al 'Arab*, vol. 4 (Beirut: 1988), 1109; and E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2 (The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 2416.

6. No matter what an individual attempts to do in life, whether it is removed or in accordance with the dictates of his/her fiṭrah, the central spiritual nature of his/her being cannot be avoided. So even if one is inclined outwardly to worship idols, another person, or a political system, one is still motivated by this inner drive to know God. In other words, he/she has only found a substitute for God. It is in this sense that the central nature

of an individual also manifests itself on the periphery. The primordial character of humanity's theomorphic nature is affirmed with reference to a covenant made between it and God in the former's preexistential state (before creation):

> When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam from thy loins—their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): "Am I not your Lord?' — they said: 'Yea! We do testify!" (Qur'an 7:172)

7. S. H. Nasr, "Who is Man," *The Sword of Gnosis*, ed. J. Needleman (Maryland: 1974), 210.

8. Nasr, "Who is Man," 210. Cf. A. F. R. Hamid, *Self Knowledge and Spiritual Yearning* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, n.d.), 34-39, for a discussion of the Prophet as the ideal prototype.

9. Nasr, "Who is Man," 210.

10. For a detailed discussion of the heart and intellect, see Mohamed, *Islamic Conception*, chapter 2.

11. These three levels of perception are distinguished clearly, although our table shows that they can also be interrelated at different levels. Thus, *'aql* and *qalb* may well be combined at the level of spiritual perception. The objective of each level of perception is associated with certain levels of knowledge and reality. Through the senses, we acquire knowledge of the physical environment, namely, knowledge of the biosphere. Through the mind, we acquire analytical and synthetic knowledge, namely, a priori knowledge that includes knowledge of such metaphysical and abstract phenomena as the concept of justiceor of God. The "heart-knowledge" or knowledge of the intellect (*'aql*) involves the experience of spiritual realities: elevation of the self, or attaining the presence of God.

12. Mohamed, *Islamic Conception*, chapter 2. Cf. also A. H. A. Nadwi, *Religion and Civilization* (Lucknow, India: Islamic Research an Publications, 1970), 14-15.

13. I. R. al Fārūqī, "Islam and Culture as Civilisation" in *Islam and Contemporary Society*, ed. S. Azzam (New York: 1982), 154. For a detailed philosophical exposition of Islamic ethics, cf. Y. Mohamed, *Translation and Introduction: Kitāb al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al Sharī'ah* (Ph.D. diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1992). See also R. al Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al Sharī'ah*, ed. A. Y. 'Ajamī (Cairo: Dār al Wafā' li Ṭibā'ah wa Tawzī', Cairo, 1987).

14. C. E. M. Joad, *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 436.

15. A. H. al-Hashimi, "On Islamizing the Discipline of Psychology," in *Social and Natural Sciences*, eds. I. R. al Fārūqī and A. O. Naseef (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 61. Cf. M. Badri, *The Dilemma of the Muslim Psychologists* (London: MWH London Publishers, 1979), 7-11. Badri points out that western psychology is too limited to deal with psychospiritual aspects. He cites the example of Skinner's behaviorism, which regards ethical behavior as due to contingencies involving many kinds of positive and negative reinforcers.

16. The Qur'an uses the term *nafs* to denote the psychic dimension (or the self) of an individual, a dynamic faculty that, if trained properly, can develop to the highest stage of spiritual and ultimately attain consonance with the *rūḥ*. The lowest level of the psychospiritual state of the *nafs* (psyche) is called *al nafs al ammārah* (the commanding self). This state constitutes the negative psychic force in the individual, the seat of his/her egoistic and selfish drives and may be contrasted to the *qalb* (heart), the *rūḥ* (spirit) or the *'aql* (intellect), which represent the individual's spiritual drive that is always seeking the presence of God.

17. Qur'an 12:53.

18. Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 243.

(i) The selfish desire of the *nafs*: it desires its own pleasures through its innate tendencies of lust (*shahwah*) and passion (*hawā*);

(ii) The autonomous claim of the *nafs*: it claims control over its self-centred power (*hawl*) and strength (*quwwah*) and the ability to follow its own planning (*taḍbīr*), without regard for God's guidance;

(iii) The antagonistic temper of the *nafs*: it tempts the individual to act in accordance with his/her natural inclination for restless movement (*ḥarakah*) and listless passivity (*sukūn*) in opposition to God's command (*'amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*); and

(iv) The *nafs* as the individual's enemy and Satan's companion: it is humanity's worst enemy (*'adūw*) and associates itself with Satan by taking heed of the whispering.

19. Al-Hashimi, *On Islamizing*, 64.

20. Najm al Din Razi, *The Path of God's Bondsman from Origin to Return,* tr. Hamid Algar (New York: Caravan Books, 1982), 195.

21. Nawawi, *Forty Hadith*, tr. Ibrahim and Davies (Kazi Publications, n.d.), 110.

22. See M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazali* (Aligarh: 1962) and H. al Ghazālī, *Mizān al 'Amal*, ed. Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: 1964).

23. M. A. Sābūnī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr ibn Kathīr,* vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al Qur'ān al Karīm, 1981), 118. In contrast to the classical commentators, Muhammad Asad believes that *amānah* means "reason" or "intellect" and the "faculty of volition." Sayyid Quṭb and Iqbal are also of the view that *amānah* refers to the free will of man. Allāmah Tabātabā'ī, another modern scholar, views *amānah* as humanity's capacity for knowledge of God and acts of justice, which are essential for his divinely prescribed role of *khalīfah* (vicegerent of God) on earth. However, both classical and modern scholars regard the responsibility and vicegerency of humanity as integral to *amānah*. Cf. M. Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibralter: Dār al Andalūs, n.d.), 653; S. Qut'b, *Fī Ẓilāl al Qur'ān,* vol. 5 (Dār al Shurūq, 1979), 2284-85; M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1960), 95; and M. H. Tabātabā'ī, *al Mizān fī Tafsīr al Qur'ān*, vol. 16 (Tehran: Dār al Kutub al Islāmīyah), 370-74.

24. See Mohamed, *Islamic Conception*, chapter 5, for a detailed exposition of al Ghazālī's interaction theory. Chapter 4 deals with the different schools' notion of freedom.

25. M. A. Qurtubī, *al Jāmi' al Aḥkām al Qur'ān,* vol. 7, part 14 (Cairo: al Maktab al 'Arabīyah, 1967), 30.

26. Ibn Taymīyah, *Daru Ta'ārud al 'Aql wa al Naql*, vol. 8 (Riyadh: Jāmi'ah al Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al Islāmīyah, 1409/1981), 382-83.

27. D. B. MacDonald, "Fitra," in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

28. al Sābūnī and M. Sibā'ī, *al Aḥwāl al Shakhsīyah* (Damascus: University of Damascus, 1397/1978), 12.

29. al Sābūnī and M. Sibā'ī, *al Aḥwāl*, 13.

30. al Sābūnī and M. Sibā'ī, *al Aḥwāl*, 14.

31. al Sābūnī and M. Sibā'ī, *al Aḥwāl*, 14-15.

32. al Sābūnī and M. Sibā'ī, *al Aḥwāl*, 16-18.